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ABSTRACT

Following initial unsuccessful attempts, the first "Colloquy" program, a student-initiated attempt to reform higher education, was established at the University Park Campus of the Pennsylvania State University. The program was based on (a) nationally known figures addressing a large gathering; (b) nineteen panels involving a total of between 47 and 50 panelists outside the University and 30 to 40 panelists from within the University; and (c) movies, dramatic presentations and other media techniques used throughout the weekend. The success of this experience led to a second program held during the summer term. Based on these two successful experiences, a third "Colloquy" program in 1969 was organized. This experience was a successful unstructured educational experience offering student and faculty avenues of communication. (MJM)

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# COLLOQUY: A STUDENT-INITIATED EFORM IN HIGHER EDUCATION — W. FRA K HULL IV

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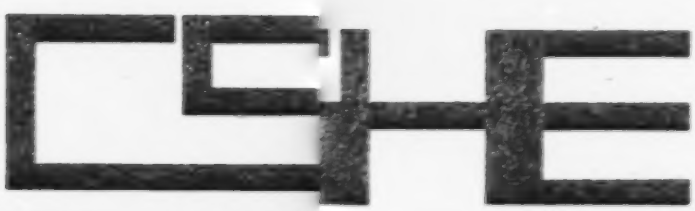

CENTER FOR THE STU Y OF HIGHER EDUCATION
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REPORT NO. 3

# COLLOQUY: A Student-Initiated Reform in Higher Education

W. Frank Hull IV

Much has been written in recent years concerning the nature and increase of student discontent in America's institutions of higher education. Some commentators have pointed out the common factors within institutions which relate to organized student protest.[1] Others have attempted to describe characteristics of student activists.[2] Still others have related the historical patterns of development behind student discontent.[3]

Most have dealt descriptively with protests under which education in the more traditional sense is curtailed or at least held at bay. But within contemporary times, from student protests have also come a few rare instances in which the form of the protest has been an attempt to reform higher education by offering alternatives to the present educational system. These forms, sometimes called "Free Universities" and organized by students to meet felt educational needs, have received little serious

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[1] cf. Masu Sasajima, Junius A. Davis, and Richard E. Peterson. "Organized Student Protest and Institutional Climate." American Educational Research Journal, V, 3 (May, 1968), 291-304.

[2] Paul Heist. "Intellect and Commitment: The Faces of Discontent." Order and Freedom on the Campus. Owen A. Knorr and W. John Minter, eds. Boulder: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1965.

[3] Frederick Rudolph. "Changing Patterns of Authority and Influence." Order and Freedom on the Campus. Owen A. Knorr and W. John Minter, eds. Boulder: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1965. Nancy Burton Bush. "The Student and His Professor: Colonial Times to Twentieth Century." The Journal of Higher Education, XL, 8 (November, 1969), 593-609.

attention from educators. This paper looks at the development and practice of an extracurricular "Free University" on the University Park campus of The Pennsylvania State University.

Professor Frederick Rudolph has reminded us that ". . . the most sensitive barometer of what is going on at the colleges is the extracurriculum."[4] At Penn State, the extracurriculum has been influenced over the last two and one half years by a group of students who appear frustrated with the more conventional instruction offered at Penn State. In step with contemporary fashion, these students are attempting to change the system.

The first expression of this discontent appeared during the Spring of 1968 when seven courses were offered under student initiative on a non-fee, non-credit, evening basis within a resident area complex. Faculty were asked to indicate any courses they would volunteer to teach within the residence area, and then popularity of these courses was ranked from data gathered through a mail questionnaire among the students. Thus, it was not surprising that most of the resident area courses were closed within five minutes after registration opened. The venture was named "CREATION: Cultural and Recreational Education Achieved Through Investigations Ordinarily Neglected," a not-immodest title symbolizing the idealism and will of the students for change.

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[4]Frederick Rudolph. loc. cit., 4.

The ability to sustain student enthusiasm in these courses depended on the instructional approach. The instructor who saw his function within these courses in terms of conveying a body of knowledge lost his students rapidly and without regard to the amount of initial interest exhibited by the students in his topic. Conversely, the instructor who saw his function in terms of listening to what his students were asking and then directing his course to these questions had a profitable educational venture. In the latter case, students wrote papers and carried on a seminar-level course of instruction despite the fact that there were no grades to be given or credits earned.[5] Overall, as one student concluded, " . . . much of the 'success' of a CREATION course depended upon the attitude of the teacher and the method in which he presented his course."

Assuming that if faculty were more carefully selected a more valid educational experience would result, the students tried again. This time another residential area was used and faculty were selected on their "reputation" for using "innovative instructional techniques" with undergraduates. Called PROBE, again the initial student reception was overwhelming, but instructors were frustrated in their attempts to create avid learners through bigger and better techniques. It was clear that more

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[5] cf. W. Frank Hull IV. "CREATION: An Evaluation of an Experimental College." The Journal of College Student Personnel X, 6 (November, 1969), 414-417.

was needed than "innovative instructional techniques."

At the same time that PROBE was operating, the students were plotting strategy. Unfortunately, novelty took over and each residence area administrator seemed to want an experimental college for "his" particular area. Student energies were thus diversified, fragmented, and ultimately frustrated through the absence of any overall planning. In an attempt to resolve this problem, the effort was made to establish a university-wide "experimental college" under a "Committee for a Penn State Free University," but the pole of student idealism and the pragmatic task of setting up such an "experimental college" did not mix. One element among the students strongly saw it as their purpose to initiate "overall academic reform" at the University. A second element was willing to settle for temporary educational experiences to meet immediate needs among present students. The students were asking themselves, "What should our aim be -- Immediate results or long-term changes?" Some argued that neither was possible. It appeared to most as if "the movement" had failed.

Nevertheless, the commitment of a few of the leaders persisted. These students felt frustrated under the present instructional system and were determined to do something about it. It was thus that a new educational experience appeared at Penn State in the Spring of 1969. COLLOQUY . . . THE AMERICAN DREAM: CONFLICT '69 was a mass program of lectures and panels specifically attempting to make students aware of the fact that education did not have to

be as dull and uninvolving as it often seemed. The leaders believed that academic reform required student motivation which refused to be satisfied by an inadequate course of instruction. In this regard, COLLOQUY sought:

> " (1) to provide the campus with an innovative out-of-class learning situation,
>
> (2) to prove that students can and will run educational programs,
>
> (3) to show responsible, constructive student action, and
>
> (4) to facilitate community effort toward one education objective."[6]

The format of COLLOQUY varied significantly from both CREATION and PROBE. Three nationally known figures were invited to address mass gatherings. Lecturers Ralph Nader, Muhammad Ali, and Al Capp were specifically selected to represent diverse opinions and did so. Nineteen panels on far-ranging topics involved a total of between forty-seven to fifty panelists from outside the University and thirty to forty panelists from within the University community. Movies, dramatic presentations, and other media techniques were presented throughout the weekend. From three to five thousand listeners attended the mass meetings while the number at individual panels during the weekend ranged from seventy-five to five hundred.

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[6]Personal communication from Theresa A. Jablonski, Chairman of COLLOQUY, Fall, 1969.

By any standard criterion, COLLOQUY was a success. COLLOQUY buttons were visible on the town streets; faculty expressed delight and amazement; some administrators were quietly surprised that "students" could actually pull off such a large-scale weekend; and, most of all, the University began to experience a modest sense of intellectual "community" in which students and faculty, guests and local people, of all ideologies could talk together. A "continual interaction of minds and ideas,"[7] which has always been a goal of American higher education, seemed more tangible.

Still the student leaders were dissatisfied. They perceived that education was continuing "as usual" in the classrooms, as if COLLOQUY had never existed. The venture had been fine for the moment, but the "system" was still persisting despite the reformers.

COLLOQUY had become a developing ideal at Penn State, and its student leaders continued to try to reform the instructional system. A second COLLOQUY was held during the normally less-active Summer Term. Small panels of faculty and community figures discussing issues of drugs, race, and student involvement in university administration drew from one hundred and fifty to two hundred student listeners. These panels were characterized by discussion which added to clarifying the areas of agreement and disagreement among those present but did little to change undergraduate instruction at the University.

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[7]Letter from Larry Rubenstein, the sophomore Chairman of COLLOQUY, to participants in COLLOQUY.

With the return of the students in the Fall of 1969, the student leaders reevaluated their goals and methods:

> "It became apparent to us that we must seriously look at COLLOQUY and reestablish our priorities. We soon realized that COLLOQUY cannot be an end in itself, but rather the means to the end--the end being eventual academic reform.
>
> We now view COLLOQUY as an ideal encompassing:
>
> 1) a unique learning experience
>
> 2) an awakening for the student body
>
> 3) an avenue for commitment
>
> 4) a channel and vehicle for University reform in academics."[8]

One thing was clear at this point: the student leaders were not about to give up.

So it was that COLLOQUY, 1969 . . . THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATION was an attempt to provide for "unstructured education to happen." Forty "guests" from all over the country were present to "do their own thing." There were spontaneous outbreakings of foot painting, balloon tunneling, and "buck-buck" for pure fun along with small group discussions on faculty-student relations, the source of meaning for life, student culture, identity within a university community, etc. Faculty were invited to live or eat

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[8]Personal communication from Theresa A. Jablonski, Chairman of COLLOQUY, Fall, 1969.

in the dormitories while discussions continued around the clock[9] in the Student Union Building. To the uninvolved observer the whole thing appeared to be chaos. One student reported, "We found out that faculty and administrators think only in outlines and without such a structure are immobilized." The student was right. The majority of the faculty had a difficult time at just "being" present with a group of students and "rapping". Only twenty Penn State faculty participated fully in these informal discussions, and only ten accepted the offer to live in the dormitories. Other faculty were hesitant to go into the dorms alone. Consequently, they stayed away. Nevertheless, those few faculty who were able to function in a non-structured atmosphere made an impact. Some were still sitting on the floor of the Student Union Building after midnight talking with groups of from three to twelve students about Vietnam, professional requirements and job opportunities, feelings on being a teacher at Penn State, etc.

Some students were frankly surprised. One exclaimed to his long-haired cohort, "See that man on the floor; that's my Dean." As an example of what occurred, at least one lengthy discussion went on within a dining hall between a white staff member and a Black youth focusing on the psychological needs of Blacks today which seem to require confrontation and immediate action in order

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[9] By "around the clock" is literally meant that the building was open twenty-four hours and discussions continued throughout that time changing only in the individuals involved.

for the Black to feel that anything has happened. In other words, this COLLOQUY was a massive cluster of individual experiences and encounters, and the impromptu nature of the overall design, "THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATION," made a failure of any attempt to "evaluate" this COLLOQUY in terms of success or failure.

COLLOQUY has, though, pointed out what these students want: they are seeking a faculty with whom they can interact not only on the topic of political theory in twentieth century America, but also as real human beings who love, hate, cry, and feel. This is unexpected to most faculty and most are unsure as to how to react. Both the students and the faculty are pressed into an increasingly impersonal environment and both seem to be trying to find some place to identify as a person. As for the faculty member, his identification is with a discipline, yet he is under constant pressure from the increasing academic demands of his profession, commitments to his family, and his outside interests. As for the student, he comes as one of several thousand freshmen trying to find something to provide meaning and is increasingly unable to identify with the "rah-rah" college spirit.

COLLOQUY is still a relatively isolated phenomenon within American higher education. But like the student-initiated literary societies, fraternities, and athletic matches of the previous century, COLLOQUY offers the potential for a reform movement in higher education. Change, always occurs in this way.

> "It is not the old which creates the new. That which creates the new is beyond the old and beyond the new . . .. We realize this situation in its depths only if we do not continue to say, 'We know where the new will come from -- it will come from <u>this</u> institution, <u>this</u> movement, . . . or this philosophy . . .'

> None of these, of course, is excluded from being the place where the new will appear. But none of these guarantees its appearance . . . We must realize as profoundly as possible that the former things have been old, that they destroy our period just when we try most courageously to preserve the best of it . . . In no way but the most passionate striving for the new shall we become aware that the old is old and dying . . . A new which is not able to throw the old into the past, in remembrance as well as in reality, is not the really new . . .."[10]

To hold firmly to the educational traditions of the past is to deny the very creative impulses within today's age. Students are neglected in higher education, yet it is they who must create new meaning within higher education. Even the brightest are often bored and sometimes drop out rather than "play the game".[11] Through COLLOQUY, students are attempting to fill some of their own educational needs. The value is in the experience, in the "passionate striving" to which Tillich refers. Continuing educational reform is exactly where an institution's best educators and students should be. Here educators can interact with students at the very point where the intellectual pulse of the student body may be felt. In the past, reforms in higher education have often caught educators unaware. There is little excuse for unawareness

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[10] Paul Tillich. "Behold, I am Doing a New Thing." The Shaking of the Foundations. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, 182-184.

[11] John W. Snyder. "A New Use for the SAT: Helping Salvage Potential Dropouts." College Board Review, #70 (Winter, 1968-1969), 5-9, claims that a "bright" student with a verbal SAT above six hundred and fifty but with a high school rank in the sixth percentile rank or below has a ninety-five percent dropout rate during the first year.

in this case. Both the student reformers and the faculty must join together to "create the new." The alternative is for higher education to find itself once again directed rather than directing. While Harold Taylor suggests that, " . . . the mark of a true university is whether or not it takes its students seriously," the university must also examine whether it takes itself seriously and, indeed, whether it understands that "self."